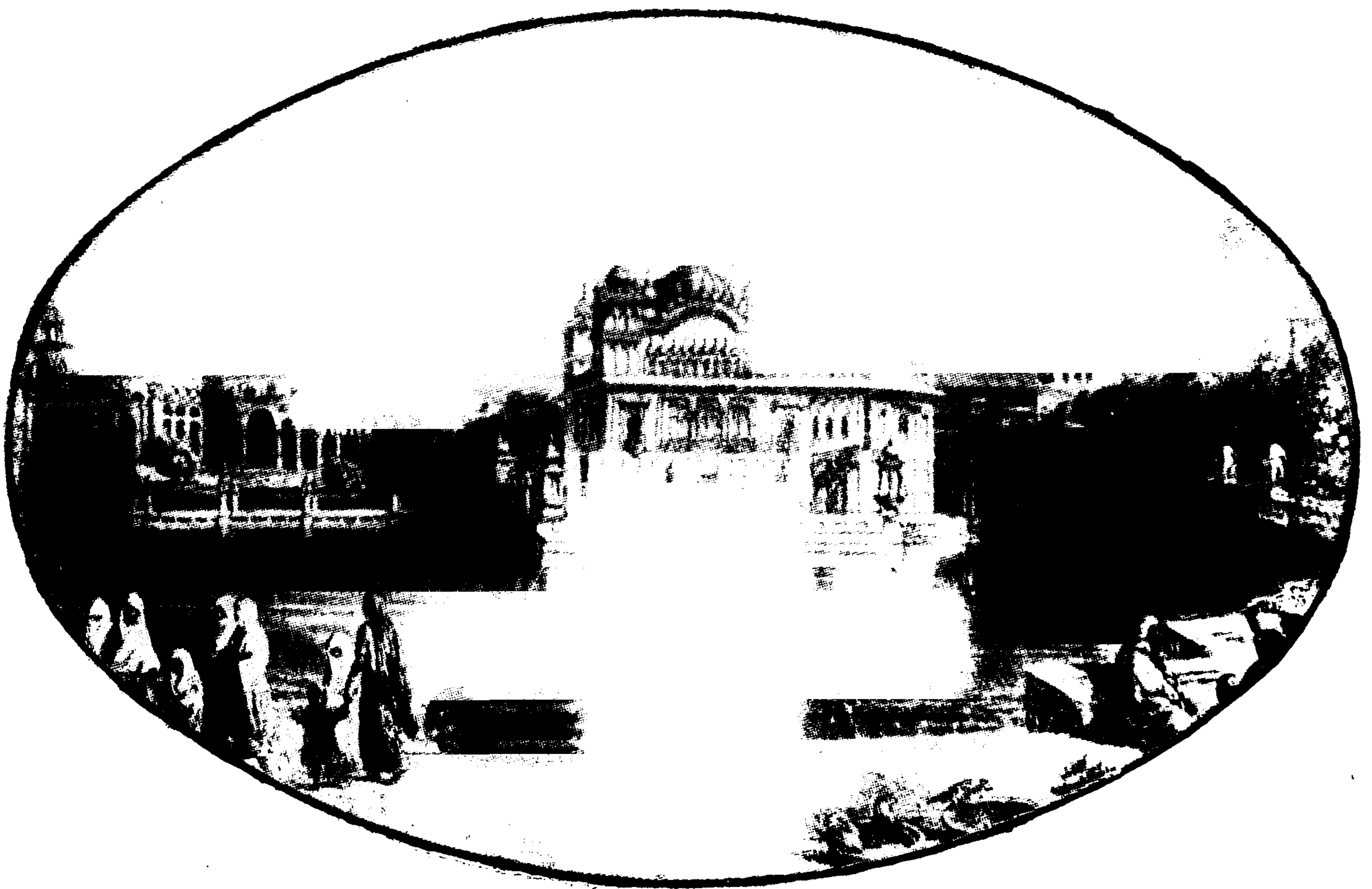


# The Sikhs

**The Minority Rights Group**

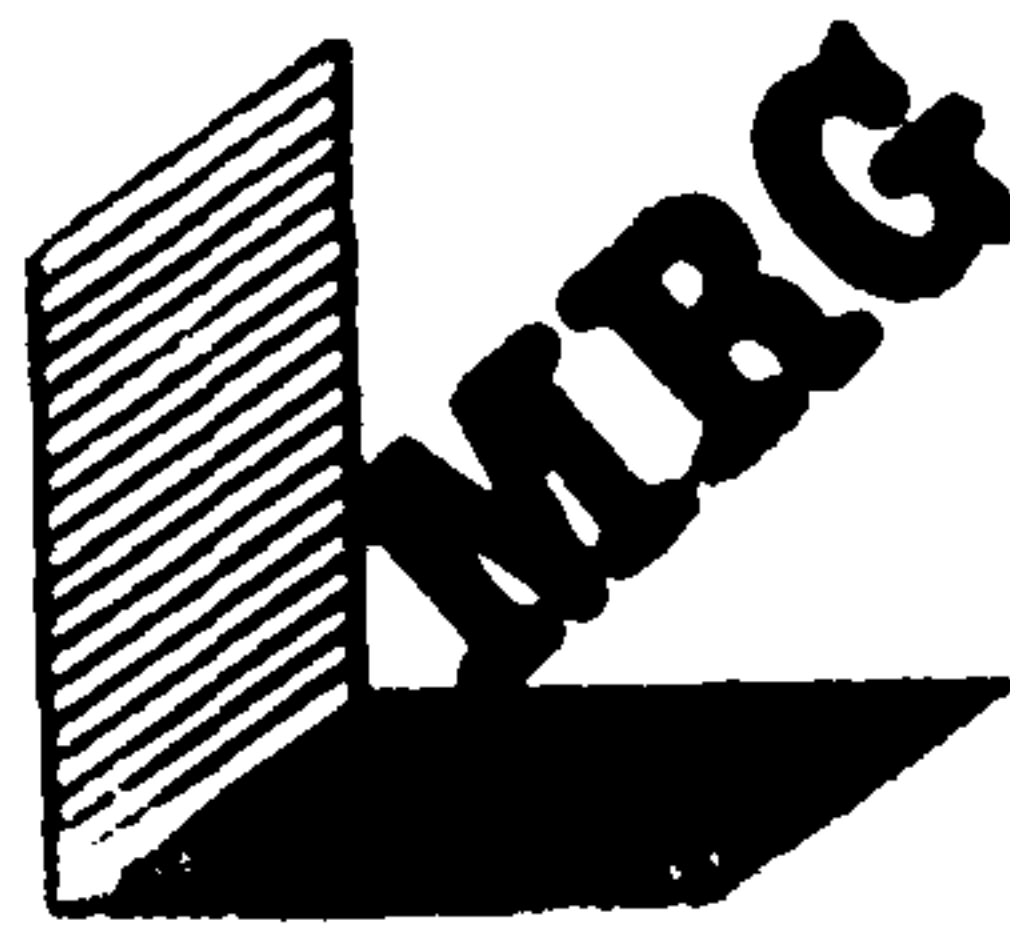
**Report No. 65**



**Christopher Shackle**



**WINNER 1982 UNA  
MEDIA PEACE PRIZE**



The Minority Rights Group is concerned with research and information dissemination. Its principal aims are—

- + To secure justice for minority or majority groups suffering discrimination, by investigating their situation and publicising the facts as widely as possible, to educate and alert public opinion throughout the world;
- + To help prevent, through publicity about violations of human rights, such problems from developing into dangerous and destructive conflicts which when polarised, are very difficult to resolve.
- + To foster, by its research findings, international understanding of the factors which create prejudiced treatment and group tensions, thus helping to promote the growth of a world conscience regarding human rights.



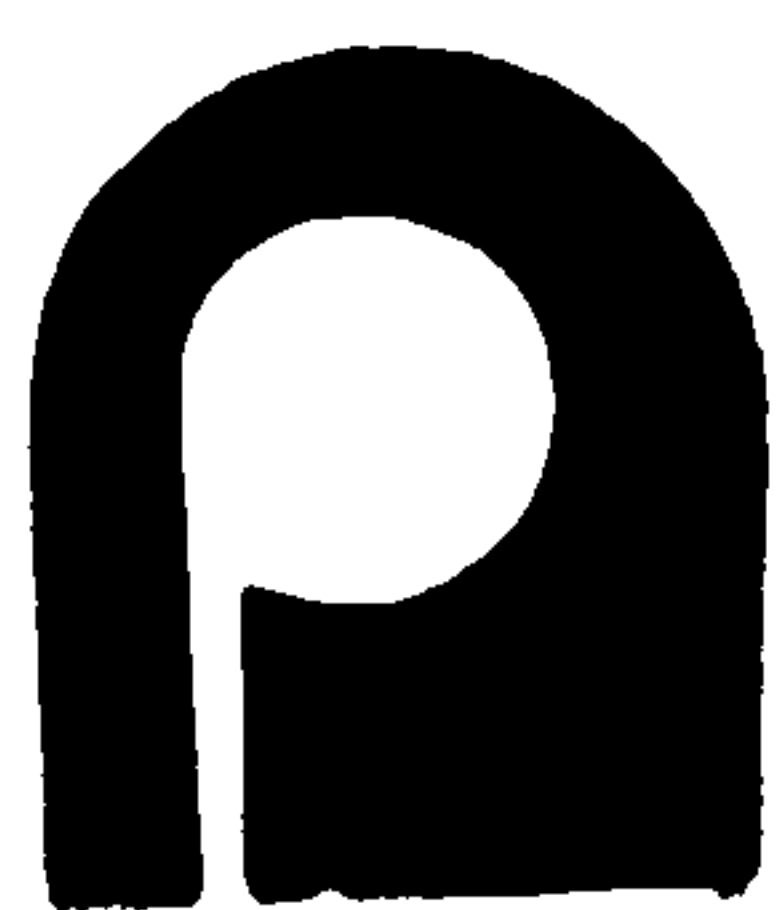
# **The Sikhs**

**By Dr. Christopher Shackle**

Jo bole so nihal: Sat Sri Akal

He who says this is saved: Truth is the immortal Lord

—TRADITIONAL SIKH



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## PREFACE

The age is past when human rights were considered as 'non-sense on stilts.' The thinking and outlook have radically changed. There has been considerable progress in the field of human rights largely on account of the excellent work done by various human rights organisations.

Yet much more remains to be done especially with regard to the plight and problems of minority groups in our country—the Indian sub-continent—where the rights of so many groups and sub-groups are daily violated on account of prejudices, irrational beliefs, economic and power struggles. Minority Rights Group India (MRG India) is a response to this need.

The MRG concept of minorities is wider and more comprehensive than the traditional one of political or linguistic minorities. It takes in all groups and sections of people, sometimes even majorities who on account of their non-dominant position in society and because of their special and peculiar traits or characteristics—may be physical, cultural, racial or ideological—are subjected to disabilities and are victims of discrimination; and whose weak and subordinate position makes them silent sufferers of continual exploitation.

MRG India is an autonomous body. It is not connected or associated with any political party nor does it subscribe to any particular ideology. It has no political or ideological hang-ups. MRG India believes that when facts are laid bare and the truth is known and public opinion alerted, the forces of reason and sanity will in the ultimate analysis prevail over those of prejudice and irrationality.

The report on the Sikhs by Dr. Christopher Shackle has been published by the Minority Rights Group in London. In view of the importance of the issues involved, MRG India has thought it fit to publish the present book in the hope that the presentation of the facts and material may assist the people in a clear understanding of the basic issues underlying the Punjab problem.

**Soli. J. Sorabjee**



[www.archive.org/details/namdhari](http://www.archive.org/details/namdhari)

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## *Introduction*

The Sikhs are in fact a minority of a rather special kind in India. They make up a very small group in the country as a whole, amounting to only about 1.9% of the total population, far less than the Muslims (11%) or even the Christians (2.6%). But 80% of Indian Sikhs are concentrated in their homeland, the small state of Punjab which lies on the north-western border with Pakistan. Here they actually constitute a small majority over the Punjabi Hindu population. The resultant attitude so characteristic of the Sikhs has accordingly been well described as a 'majority-minority complex',<sup>1</sup> and it is to an attempted explanation of the historical factors which underlie this outlook, and to a description of its manifestation in recent events, which have now assumed such a tragic momentum of their own, that this report is primarily addressed.<sup>2</sup>

The first version of the report was prepared in July '84 for the Minority Rights Group, London, with the purpose of informing a mainly Western audience, who might be expected to know rather little about the Sikhs and their place in Indian society. This updated version has been prepared at the request of the Minority Rights Group (India). Though written by one who is himself neither a Sikh nor an Indian, it has been motivated by a deeply felt personal concern with the position of the Sikhs in India. The grim progress of events in 1984, which saw in turn communal violence in Punjab, the storming of the Golden Temple in Amritsar by the Indian army, the assassination of the Indian Prime Minister by two Sikh bodyguards, and the ensuing mob revenge against Sikhs in Delhi and elsewhere, have provided in their turn more than enough occasions for despair. If this short report can in any way assist in the development of the understanding which will so desperately be needed in the immediate future, its purpose will have been amply fulfilled.



# I

## *The Sikhs and their History*

The historical vision of Islam is as broadly universal as that of Christianity, while the sacred mythology of the Hindu pantheon is hardly to be reduced to the scale of human chronology. The Sikhs, by contrast, are a community with a lively sense of local historical identity.

Their history has always been closely linked with that of the Punjab, the 'Land of the Five Rivers' traversed by the five great tributaries of the Indus, of which the present Indian state of Punjab forms a small part. Lying as it does between the classic invasion route through the Khyber Pass and Delhi, the historic capital of northern India, the history of the Punjab has inevitably been a turbulent one, and the Sikhs have felt the full effects of this turbulence during the five centuries of their existence. Both the triumphs and the sufferings which have in turn been experienced are deeply engraved in the Sikh consciousness, and they continue to exert a powerful influence on present attitudes.

The history of the Sikhs before Indian Independence in 1947 falls into three main periods. During the age of the Gurus (1469-1708), the community was formed and led by a succession of ten living spiritual leaders, who established its central doctrines and institutions. Though initially inspired by peaceful ideals, the Sikhs were increasingly led into military confrontation with the forces of the then all-powerful Mughal empire. The militarization of the Sikhs was formally established by the last living Guru, after whose death supreme spiritual authority was vested in the scriptures.

The subsequent period (1708-1849) marks the heroic age of Sikh history, during which the Sikhs struggled, often at great odds, against both governors sent from Delhi and the Muslim rulers of Afghanistan who mounted repeated invasions of India. Eventually the Sikhs emerged supreme, and established a power-



ful kingdom of their own in the Punjab. This in turn was conquered from the east by the British, during whose rule of the area (1840-1947), the Sikhs were forced into a reappraisal of their institutional identity, both as subjects of the colonial power and as a minority whose interests were challenged by those of the larger Muslim and Hindu communities.

## II

### *The Age of the Gurus*

In India, as in Europe, the 16th century was a time of great religious renewal. Northern India had long been under the political dominance of the Delhi Sultanate earlier established by Muslim invasions from Afghanistan, and the Muslim population had been greatly augmented by conversions from the lower Hindu castes, attracted by the prospect of improvement in their status and drawn by the appeal of the mystical version of Islam promulgated by the Sufi missionaries.

The majority of the Sultans' subjects remained within the world of Hinduism, but here too there had arisen powerful movements of religious renewal to challenge the legalistic ritualism of the orthodox Brahmans. Some of these movements took as their object of devotion a particular incarnation of one of the Hindu gods, of whom the most appealing proved to be Krishna, still the greatest focus of adoration among the Hindus of northern India.

Other teachers, conscious of the dangers of idolatry inherent in such personalized devotional cults, sought to direct the loving adoration of their followers to the One God Himself. Creator of all, He was conceived as being able to be known only by those who would listen in their hearts to the call. He graciously bestows through the spiritual True Guru, who is the manifestation of His message to humanity. From the uncompromising interiority of this central teaching there inevitably followed a rejection of the claims of the doctrines and rituals of orthodox or devotional Hinduism, or those of Islam, to point to the path of human salvation.

Equally implicit in this rejection of institutional authority was the risk that such teachings, however powerfully expressed by their original proponents, would lack the shield such authority can provide and thus lose their effect when their initial impetus



had been weakened by time. This indeed proved to be the case with most of the movements founded by teachers of the ideal of devotion to the Formless God. Becoming formless themselves, they were soon accommodated into the ever-receptive and all-embracing strands of the Hindu tradition from which they had emerged. Though the origins of Sikhism similarly lie in this current of reformist Hinduism, the Sikhs however stand out as the one community which, although always closely linked to Hinduism, has throughout successfully maintained its own identity separate from it.

Unlike earlier reformers, drawn from such humble occupational backgrounds as weavers or cobblers, Guru Nanak (1469-1539), the founder of Sikhism, was born a Hindu of the high-ranking Khattri caste, whose special functions are commerce and administration. As a young man he was employed in the chancery of a local Muslim nobleman, until he underwent at the age of about 30 a profound mystical experience. From this he emerged with the cryptic words 'There is no Hindu, there is no Muslim', making it clear that the overwhelming quality of his vision left little room for much value to be attached to current orthodoxies. The Sikh tradition which he founded was not some supposed syncretism of Hinduism and Islam, but a new faith transcending both, which was destined to define itself as distinct from the Hindu world from which it had emerged.

After a period of extended wanderings as a religious pilgrim, Guru Nanak returned to the Punjab to establish a community of the followers, called Sikhs or 'disciples', who were drawn to him. Mostly of Hindu origin, as Sikhs have continued to be, these first disciples were taught to follow as their way of life the practical existence of the householder, who feeds himself, his dependents, and the needy through his own efforts, in direct contrast to the ascetic ideals so prominent in most Indian religious traditions. Their chief act of devotion, in addition to private prayer, was to be the singing in congregation of the Guru's hymns, which embody his teachings in poetry of formidable beauty and insight. These precepts have remained as the core teachings of Sikhism, often summed up in the triple commandment to 'adore the Divine Name, practise one's livelihood, and share its fruits'.

Guru Nanak's final service to his followers was his appoint-

# PUNJAB AND ITS NEIGHBOURS



Population of principal cities (1971) in thousands

	Hindus	Sikhs	
Amritsar	293	158	(35%)
Chandigarh	162	51	(22%)
Jullundur	127	65	(34%)
Ludhiana	263	130	(33%)
Patiala	87	62	(42%)



ment of a human successor to himself as Guru to guide their affairs. The successful maintenance of the identity of the Sikh community during its formative years is to be attributed not only to the power of Guru Nanak's teachings, but to the administrative skills brought to bear by his successors, all members of the Khattri caste, who directed its development during the succeeding generations.

By the time of the fifth Guru Arjan (1581-1606), the Sikh community had greatly increased in numbers and influence in the Punjab. Its position was further enhanced by the outstanding quality of Guru Arjan's leadership, which did much to establish the lines of its future development. It was he who had constructed the temple in the centre of the sacred pool at Amritsar which was to become the holiest place of Sikhism. It was also Guru Arjan who in 1604 installed in this *Harimandir* or 'Temple of God' the definitive collection of hymns that were henceforth recognized as its scriptures. Known as the *Adi Granth* or 'Original Book', this contains hymns by the first five Sikh Gurus, besides compositions by earlier saints, both Hindu and Muslim, with ideas similar to those of Guru Nanak.

The strategic location of the Punjab was, however, quite as evident in the early 17th century as it is today. Although the Mughal empire, established in the last years of Guru Nanak's life, was initially religiously tolerant, no potential rival to its political authority in the sensitive area between its twin capitals of Delhi and Kabul could be tolerated. The suspicions of the Emperor Jehangir (1605-1627) were recorded in his diary. Speaking of Guru Arjan, he wrote:

'He was noised about as a religious and worldly leader. They called him Guru, and from all directions crowds of fools would come to him and express great devotion to him. This busy traffic had been carried on for three or four generations. For years the thought had been presenting itself to my mind that either I should put an end to this false traffic, or he should be brought into the fold of Islam.'<sup>3</sup>

The first course was decided upon. Guru Arjan was arrested on the Emperor's orders and executed at the provincial capital of Lahore in 1606. His martyrdom was to set a fateful example.

The Sikh community, which had come to be known as the Panth or the 'path', had increased chiefly through the influx of



large numbers of warlike Jats, the main farming caste of the central Punjab. The Sikh Panth now became increasingly set on a policy of armed confrontation with the imperial Muslim rulers. Guru Hargobind (1606-1644) symbolized this shift in emphasis by his construction of the Akal Takht, the seat of militant temporal authority, opposite his father's Golden Temple at Amritsar. Confrontation between the Sikhs and the Mughal state was heightened by the policy of orthodox Islamization pursued by the last great Emperor Aurangzeb (1658-1707). The eighth Guru died in childhood as an imperial hostage, and his successor Guru Tegh Bahadur (1664-1675) was later executed in the main street of Delhi.

The tenth Guru Gobind Singh (1675-1708) was destined to formalize the change of emphasis from peaceful devotion to warlike confrontation into which the Sikh Panth had been led by the events of history. He did this to such effect as to be regarded as a figure of hardly less importance in Sikh tradition than Guru Nanak himself. The changes which he instituted are traditionally associated with the assembly which he held at his seat at Anandpur in the Punjab hills in 1699.

It was the custom of the Sikhs to gather before their Guru on Baisakhi, the spring festival which marks the Indian New Year. On this occasion, a novel procedure was adopted. Guru Gobind stepped from a tent and asked for a Sikh ready to lay down his life. One at last came forward, and accompanied the Guru into the tent, where the sound of a sword-stroke was followed by the spread of a pool of blood. The process was repeated four times, at the end of which the five volunteers (drawn from different castes to symbolize the teachings of equality inherent in Sikhism) were shown to be alive, goats having been slain in their place.

These first respondents to the Guru's command, known as the *panj piare* or 'five beloved ones', were pronounced the nucleus of a new community, which received the name of the Khalsa, 'the Company of the Pure'. Baptism was administered to them, and they in turn baptized the Guru. Like all male Sikhs who henceforth accepted the new discipline, he received the martial Rajput titles of Singh or 'Lion', and undertook to assume the unshorn hair and beard, the wearing of the sword, and the other outward marks of the new order.

Whatever the precise details of the regulations actually intro-



duced at that time, which are a matter for historical debate, the fact remains that the Baisakhi ceremony at Anandpur in 1699 marks in Sikh consciousness the turning-point in the evolution of their community. The Panth would continue to include, as it does still, many *sahajdhari* Sikhs who follow the teachings of the Gurus without adopting the baptismal tokens of the Khalsa. But it was henceforward the bearded and turbanned members of the new order who would be regarded as the guardians of the community's orthodoxy.

The position of the Khalsa Sikhs at the heart of the Sikh Panth was confirmed by Guru Gobind Singh's subsequent enactments. During a brief lull in his battles with the Mughals, he revised the *Adi Granth* so as to include his father's compositions at the village of Damdama. His own four sons had been killed during his lifetime, and he pronounced that the Guruship was henceforward to be vested in the scriptures, to which the honorific title of *Guru Granth Sahib* was now attached. By one of the accidents of political history, Guru Gobind Singh himself was assassinated in mysterious circumstances while accompanying Aurangzeb's successor on a campaign in the Deccan. The site of his martyrdom at Nander, near Hyderabad, marks with Amritsar and his birthplace at Patna, his seat at Anandpur, and his resting-place at Damdama, one of the central places of Sikh religious authority, called *takht* or 'throne'. After his death, the Guruship now enshrined in the scriptures, was to be claimed by men only at the price of violent rejection by the majority of the Sikh Panth.

### III

## *The Heroic Age*

Power struggles in Delhi led to a rapid decline in the central authority of the Mughal empire after the death of Guru Gobind Singh. A massive revolt by the Khalsa was suppressed, but guerrilla activity by the Sikhs, grouped in small cavalry bands called *jatha*, continued to be directed against the Muslim governors of Lahore. Though no longer possessing a single unquestioned leader, the Sikh commanders met as circumstances permitted at Amritsar for councils of war which directed the operations of the Dal Khalsa, the 'Army of the Khalsa'. Decisions on wider religious issues, sanctioned by the presence of the holy scriptures, were called *gurmatta* or 'intention of the Guru' and regarded as binding on all Sikhs.

The spirit of the Khalsa faced severe tests. A powerful governor of Lahore instituted a policy of ruthless repression, offering a reward for each Sikh head brought to him. This repression culminated in the sack of Amritsar and the defilement of the Golden Temple, followed by a slaughter of the Sikh forces in 1746 which is remembered as the first *ghalughara* or 'Lesser Holocaust'.

The next year saw the first of a long series of invasions of the Punjab mounted by Ahmad Shah Abdali of Afghanistan with the ambition of conquering the territories of the Mughal empire for himself. The Sikhs were immediately drawn into conflict with the Afghans, who regularly retaliated by desecrating the temple at Amritsar. One of the most famous martyrs of Sikh history, Baba Deep Singh, is remembered for his heroic defence of the holy shrine in 1757, when he is said to have fought on with head in hand after decapitation by the Afghans. On his sixth invasion in 1762, Abdali carried out another great massacre of the Sikhs, remembered as the 'Greater Holocaust.'

The traditional picture of the Sikhs of this period as warriors



fighting against great odds for the freedom of their faith and the cause of national independence from the hated foreign foe, treacherously opposed by Punjabi Muslims all too ready to side with their co-religionists, and most inadequately supported by the craven Hindu population, may correspond only in part with the known facts. But it is a picture continually reinforced in popular Sikh imagination,<sup>4</sup> and the continuing power of its inspiration should not be underestimated.

The Sikhs were in fact to triumph, and their war-cry of *raj karega khalsa* 'the Khalsa shall rule!' was to be fulfilled. While Abdali's invasions had destroyed other local claimants to power, the Afghans were unable to establish their own authority in the Punjab. In this power vacuum the way lay open for a number of Sikh chieftains to carve out principalities for themselves. Victory in the internecine war which inevitably followed was finally gained by Ranjit Singh. His army captured Lahore in 1799, and he ruled there as Maharajah of the Punjab until his death in 1839.

His expansion to the east was checked by the British, with whom a frontier was established along the river Sutlej. In the cis-Sutlej territories under British control some Sikh states, of which Patiala was the largest, continued their separate existence under British paramountcy. Elsewhere in the Punjab the Khalsa, in whose name Ranjit Singh ruled, was supreme. Its forces rapidly subjugated the Afghan territories to the west and Kashmir to the north and eventually reached as far as Lhasa in Tibet.

Popularly known as the 'Lion of the Punjab', Ranjit Singh proved a gifted ruler well able to maintain his independence from the British. A powerful army was organized along Western lines, and a stable administration created. Both were of advantage to the maintenance of the kingdom's independence, though achieved at the expense of the more democratic traditions that had earlier guided the Khalsa. The political success of the Sikhs naturally encouraged a growth in their numbers. Royal patronage was also lavishly extended to Sikh institutions, and the present appearance of the Golden Temple and other major shrines largely dates from their reconstruction during Maharaja Ranjit Singh's time.

After his death, however, the kingdom rapidly fell prey to civil war between contenders to the throne, with increasing

power being exercised by the councils of Sikh troops. Intrigue between the various factions soon permitted the British to intervene. After fierce fighting in the two Anglo-Sikh Wars of 1845-46 and 1848-49, the Khalsa army was dissolved as an independent force, and the half century during which the Sikhs had ruled an extensive independent state was brought to an end. But the memory of its existence has never been forgotten.



## *IV*

### *Revival and Reform*

Ranjit Singh's kingdom was in no sense a theocratic state. The Maharajah's own orthodoxy was notoriously lax, and the easy-going influence of traditional Hindu custom and ritual was widespread among his Sikh subjects. With their loss of political power came a sharp decline in the numbers of those practising the religion's outward observances, and it seemed to some contemporary observers that the Sikhs would soon disappear altogether as a group distinct from the Hindus. This prophecy was to prove false, thanks to a combination of the effects of official British policies and the Sikh community's increasingly conscious redefinition of its own identity in response to the challenges it faced as a minority group in one of the provinces of 19th century British India.

Little active resistance followed the final British conquest of 1849, and some Sikh troops were soon recruited by the new rulers. During the 'Mutiny' of 1857, these played an important part in suppressing the revolt, and their loyalty to the British cause was rewarded by recruitment out of all proportion to their numbers in the population into the Indian army in the following decades. Second only in numbers to the Punjabi Muslims, the Sikhs made up some 20% of the army by the time of World War I.<sup>5</sup> The obvious economic benefit to the community was socially reinforced by the strict military policy of insistence that all Sikh troops be required to maintain the full outward symbols of a baptized member of the Khalsa.

The Jat peasantry of the central Punjab, who have historically always formed the core group of the Sikh Panth, were also highly regarded by the civil administrators of the province, whose enthusiasm produced such statements as, 'These men are the backbone of the Punjab by character and physique as well as by locality. They are stalwart, sturdy yeomen of great independence,



industry, and agricultural skill, and collectively form perhaps the finest peasantry in India.'<sup>6</sup> When vast new lands were opened for agriculture in the western Punjab by the great irrigation schemes of the later 19th century, it is no wonder that the enthusiastic response of the Sikh Jats to take up land in these Canal Colonies was equally welcomed by the administration.

Both army recruitment and the development of agriculture, which then first made the Punjab 'the bread basket of India', therefore gave the Sikhs a solid economic base in the province. And for those unable to benefit by these opportunities, their status as subjects of the British Empire permitted emigration outside India to other parts of Asia, the west coast of North America, and the countries of East Africa. Although great hardships were often faced by the first emigrants, substantial and prosperous communities were established in diaspora, and some of their prosperity was remitted back to the Punjab.

It was, however, in the Punjab of British India that the main lines of development which still determine many of the current attitudes of the Sikh Panth were first established. Then one of the major provinces of the Indian Empire, the Punjab extended in the 19th century from Peshawar to Delhi. Its size was matched by the diversity of its population, of whom the Sikhs made up only a small minority which never exceeded 15% of the total. Numerically the Muslims were in a slight overall majority, while the very substantial Hindu community was in a dominant position both in the urban economy and in the professions.

Yet a further religious dimension had been introduced by the enthusiastic endeavours of the Christian missionaries. In spite of the great coup of the adoption of Christianity by Dalip Singh, the son of Ranjit Singh and last Maharajah of the Punjab, they made converts only with considerable difficulty. But missionary propaganda did, in conjunction with British political supremacy, force all three religious communities into a substantial reappraisal of their beliefs and institutions.

As the most developed community, both economically and educationally, it was the Hindus who first formulated their riposte to the challenges posed by Western ideology. A neo-orthodox interpretation of Hinduism, according to which all truth was to be found in the Vedas, was promulgated by Swami Dayanand Saraswati (1824-1883). Although he was a Brahman



from Gujarat, his movement, known as the Arya Samaj, found its principal following among the Hindus of the Punjab, to whom its message of a Hinduism founded on scriptural authority in which there was no place for superstitious ritual made a particular appeal. Even some Sikhs were initially drawn to the movement, but the disparaging remarks made about the Gurus by Swami Dayanand soon caused them to withdraw. It came to be seen that the Arya Samajists' campaigns to 're-convert' supposedly lapsed groups to their variety of Hinduism posed a much greater threat to the Sikhs than to the Muslims, who were similarly the target of Swami Dayanand's polemical rhetoric.

Earlier movements of reform had arisen among the Sikhs, calling for the abolition of superstitious practices and closer adherence to the Gurus' teachings, but the excessive claims made for their own authority by the leaders of such movements had limited their appeal to quite small groups of followers who formed sects separate from the main body of the Panth. In the 1870s, however, the Singh Sabha movement was founded with the aim of promoting a purified Sikhism which by concentrating upon the essentials of the religion would ensure its survival and development in the reformist atmosphere of the age.

Enjoying the patronage of the Sikh aristocracy, the Singh Sabha's aims were pursued by a number of formidably energetic writers, scholars, and propagandists, whose work during the decades before and after the turn of the century<sup>7</sup> constitutes the basis of the modern theoretical underpinning of Sikhism. Propitious conditions for the continued existence of the Sikhs might have been created by imperial policies, but it was the vision of the Singh Sabha reformers which gave the community the vitality it needed for its further development. The programme which they promulgated had immediate implications not only for questions of belief and observance, but for issues of institutional organization and definitions of the Sikhs' wider cultural identity.

The stand taken by the reformers on religious issues is outlined in the next station. Here it need only be emphasized that their chief concern was to restore the faith to what was seen as its golden age of purity under the Gurus and the immediately following period, before political and material success encouraged a weakening in the discipline of the Panth, and an adoption of unorthodox Hindu practices. Particular stress was laid upon the



reform of the marriage ritual so as to exclude Hindu patterns in favour of a simpler procedure in which a central place is given to the *Guru Granth Sahib*. Official recognition of the distinctively Sikh ritual urged by the reformers was achieved with the passage of the Anand Marriage Act in 1909.

Far more bitter struggles were to be involved by another demand of the reformers. This was for the Panth to be granted direct control over its major shrines. The Sikh temples, called gurdwaras, are the focus of congregation life, and the major gurdwaras are the community's centres of pilgrimage. During the troubled years of the 18th century, when members of the Khalsa were so frequently the targets of official repression, control of many of the major gurdwaras had passed to priestly custodians who did not observe the Khalsa discipline and were often closer in outlook to the Hindus. Control of the great gurdwaras, rendered even more desirable by the vast assets of land and income with which they had been endowed during the years of Sikh supremacy, was jealously clung to by their hereditary custodians, called *mahants*. Even in the precincts of the Golden Temple itself, images of Hindu gods were publicly displayed, in flagrant opposition to the teachings of the new reformist orthodoxy. Although the images were removed from the Golden Temple in 1905, the peaceful methods of pressure through litigation which were at first adopted produced few substantial results before the First World War.

The ending of the war saw a rapid transformation in the pace and tone of Indian political life. Under Gandhi's leadership the Congress party, which led the movement for Indian independence throughout its history, developed into an institution with mass support. The authority of the British was severely shaken by the massacre of unarmed civilians at a political rally in the Jallianwala Bagh at Amritsar in 1919. The loyalist group of the older generation of upper-class reformers, whose political organization was known as the Chief Khalsa Diwan, were discredited, and the leadership of the Sikhs passed to more radical activists.

A committee, known as the Central Gurdwara Management Committee or SGPC after its Punjabi title, was set up in 1920 to manage all the Sikh shrines. In conscious imitation of the heroic days of the 18th century, action squads called *jathas* were formed of Sikh volunteers grouped into a semi-military



organization called the Akali Dal or 'Army of Immortals'.<sup>8</sup> Mass campaigns known as *morchas* were launched against the custodians of the great shrines, most notably at Nankana Sahib, sacred as the birthplace of Guru Nanak, in 1921, where over 100 Akalis were killed by the *mahant's* hired thugs. After many bitter confrontations the *morchas* of the Akali Dal proved successful. The government, which had sided with the loyalist *mahants*, was forced to accede to the Akalis' demands and control of the main shrines and their revenues was formally vested in the SGPC under the terms of the Sikh Gurdwaras Act of 1925. Since that time, the SGPC under the political control of the Akali Dal has always continued to play a central role in Sikh affairs.

These affairs have, however, of course always had an external as well as an internal dimension. Sikhs played a prominent part in the independence movement,<sup>9</sup> and contributed to its mythology one of its most potent symbols, the young left-wing activist Bhagat Singh, hanged at Lahore for terrorism in 1931.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, the community had its own interests to consider as increased powers were grudgingly bestowed upon elected provincial governments by an imperial power anxious to delay the granting of full independence for as long as possible.

In the complex manoeuvrings for obtaining political safeguards an important part was played by the decennial censuses, which reveal a regular pattern of increase through conversion in the numbers of both Sikhs and Muslims in the Punjab between 1881 and 1941. On the basis of the census returns claims could be made for increased representation under the elaborate systems of separate electorates for minority communities devised by the constitution-makers of British India. The Sikhs repeatedly put forward proposals for realignments of the Punjab's boundaries so as to exclude the Muslim majority areas of the west or the Hindu majority areas of the south-east, or for increases in the weightage to be given to their representation, but to little effect. Political control over the province remained in the hands of the Unionist party, which was dominated by largely Muslim land-owning interests.

The censuses were drawn upon for more than purely religious data, since the effect of the reformist movements which had arisen among all three major communities in the Punjab was to draw the lines of community definition in a broader sense than the strictly religious one. In no area was this more important



than in that of language, where a superficially somewhat bizarre development can be observed in the returns made by members of each religious community.<sup>11</sup>

Most inhabitants of the undivided Punjab, except on its outer peripheries, spoke one or other regional variety of Punjabi as their mother-tongue. For historical reasons, however, Punjabi had been little cultivated for literature, and even the language of the Gurus' hymns owes as much to Old Hindi as to Old Punjabi. Persian was replaced as the historic official language of the Punjab only by the British, who introduced Urdu, which until 1947 remained the main language of administration and of educated communication for those not more at home in English. The strongly Islamic character of Urdu, reflected in its use of the Arabic script, endeared it to the Muslim majority, who readily adopted it as their chosen cultural language.

Strongly committed to upholding the Hindu tradition, the Arya Samaj by contrast urged the adoption of Hindi, grammatically identical with Urdu, but using Sanskrit words and written in the sacred Devanagari script. The Singh Sabha reformers in their turn developed as one of their determinants of the new Sikh identity the cultivation of Punjabi as a literary medium, written in the holy Gurmukhi script of the *Guru Granth Sahib*. They thereby laid claim to the Sikhs' status as the most Punjabi of the Punjabis untrammelled by the supra-provincial identifications implied by the other communities' language choices. Although demands for the replacement of Urdu were rejected by the government, both Hindus and Sikhs energetically promulgated their chosen cultural languages in their own educational institutions, and did their best to ensure that a congruence was established in the census returns between religious affiliation and language allegiance. This was to have consequences whose effects are still a major factor in the political life of Punjab.

More profound and tragic consequences were, however, to stem from the cataclysmic events which accompanied the collapse of the British Raj. The 1940s were dominated by the increasingly insistent demands made by the Muslim League under Jinnah's leadership for the large Muslim minority of the subcontinent to be safeguarded from their fears of Hindu domination by being granted a separate state of their own.

If only with the aim of increasing the territory to be granted



the new country of Pakistan, overtures were made to the Sikhs to throw in their lot with the Muslims, but religious and cultural ties, not to speak of the effects of their historical experience, hardly made this a realistic possibility. Desperate last-minute attempts were made by the Sikh political leadership to secure some provision to secure an arrangement which would safeguard the Sikhs' future status, and avoid their being split into two between India and Pakistan. The idea of an independent 'Sikhistan' or 'Khalistan' was floated by the Akali Dal in 1946, but found no response.

All too soon, the inexorable round of communal massacres began with the slaughter of Sikhs and Hindus in the western Punjab provoking savage retaliation against the Muslims in the eastern districts. When independence came in August 1947, the Punjab was partitioned along communal lines and the larger western portion was allocated to Pakistan. In addition to the hundreds of thousands of Punjabis killed in a holocaust dreadful even by 20th century standards, there was an almost total exchange of populations between the two halves of the province. The entire surviving Sikh and Hindu population of western Punjab, totalling over four million refugees, came to the east, to take the places of an equivalent number of Muslims who had fled to Pakistan.

The partition line had split the Sikhs down the middle, and over 40% of the community became refugees from Pakistan. They left behind not only homes which some groups had occupied for centuries, but great assets such as the rich landholdings they had developed in the Canal Colonies, and many of their most sacred shrines, including the birthplace of Guru Nanak at Nankana Sahib. The traumatic consequences of the Partition of 1947 might be alleviated by the realization of independence, at however bloody a price, but in the minds of many Sikhs at least the lesson was drawn that the community's existence in independent India had to be safeguarded in every possible way. They might be a minority, but they were one determined that their interests should not be sold down the river by others with larger concerns.



## V

# *The Sikhs as a Religious and a Social Group*

The preceding pages should have made it clear that the modern Sikh Panth is the product of a series of quite complex developments over time. Before going on to consider its fortunes as a minority in India since 1947, it is necessary to present a brief profile of the Sikhs both as a religious and as a social group.

For definitions of modern orthodox belief and practice the standard authority is the short guide to the Sikh way of life issued in 1945 by the SGPC,<sup>12</sup> which begins by defining a Sikh as any person whose faith is in one God, the Ten Gurus and their teaching and the Adi Granth. In addition he or she must believe in the necessity and importance of amrit (initiation) and must not adhere to any other religion. Sikhism is concerned with individual life and corporate life as a member of the Sikh community.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of this triple formulation is its absence of reference to any idea of a religious hierarchy. From its origin, Sikhism has always laid powerful emphasis upon equality within the Panth, rejecting the idea of there being any religious sanction for caste-distinctions or for regarding women as being in any way an inferior sex. Sikh temples are open to all, as are the free kitchens called *langar* attached to them where food is prepared as an act of community service. The religious direction of the temple and its services is entrusted to a reader or *granthi*, who is only loosely to be equated with a 'priest'. Although the occupants of some religious offices do have a certain prestige, there is no priestly hierarchy as such in Sikhism. Temple management is in the hands of an elected committee of lay members.

But while vertical controls are weak, there are very strong horizontal pressures to religious conformity. The first sentence



of the official definition of a Sikh is broad enough to include those who believe in the religion without adopting all its outward observances, but the second sentence makes it clear that such *sahajdhari* Sikhs are regarded as falling short of the full ideal of Khalsa membership. This involves undergoing the baptismal initiation instituted by Guru Gobind Singh, and observing its vows. These are to wear the symbols known as the 'Five K's', from the initial letter of their Punjabi names, *kesh* (uncut hair), *kangha* (comb), *kirpan* (sword), *kara* (steel bangle), and *kaccha* (breeches), together with the all-important symbol of the turban for men. Ten vows also include avoidance of prohibited activities, of which the most distinctive is the ban on the use of tobacco. The strongest disapproval is reserved for those Sikhs, called *patit* or 'lapsed' Sikhs, who break the Khalsa discipline, typically by cutting the hair and beard.

To understand the strength of feeling which underlies such disapproval it is necessary to remember that links between Sikhs and Hindus in the Punjab have always been close. Intermarriages have been quite common practice, and it is in no way exceptional for one brother in a family to become a full Sikh, while the others remain Hindus, or perhaps profess an intermediate belief in some of the teachings of the Gurus. Nor is there a rigid communal divide in such matters as temple attendance or the observance of festivals. There exists therefore a whole spectrum of actual religious practice and belief between the fully orthodox positions of Sikhism at one end and Hinduism at the other.

Since it was, however, one of the principal aims of the Sikh reformers to maintain the separate identity of the Panth, it is hardly surprising that such importance should be attached by the orthodox to the avoidance of any backsliding from the observance of the full Khalsa discipline. The dangers of reabsorption into the great Hindu majority of India have been an ever-present nightmare to those seeing it as their duty to maintain the distinctive traditions of Sikhism.

This is certainly a natural consequence of a minority consciousness, which also manifests itself in the more passionate feelings which are evoked against the groups which have broken away from the community from within. Though the splinter movements which arose during the time of the Gurus have long since faded away, their formal execration is still a part of the

Khalsa vows. Similar feelings are aroused by breakaway sects of more recent origin, including those arising from the claims to personal guruship made by some reformers of the last century, especially by one of their off-shoots, the Sant Nirankari movement.<sup>13</sup>

As will be seen, the close intertwining of religious and political life characteristic of the Sikh Panth, symbolized in this century by the lay control of its religious institutions, has created the conditions for a high degree of political in-fighting amongst its leaders. But it has equally ensured a high level of internal religious cohesion. It is true that the Sikhs, like any religious group which has developed over time, are internally differentiated, but their differences are due to social and economic background rather than to purely religious factors.

It is in this light that differences of caste among the Sikhs are mostly to be understood. Caste-discrimination in the Punjab is anyway far weaker than in most parts of India, and this feature of local society is powerfully reinforced by the Gurus' teachings for the Sikhs, although it is maintained in such matters as marriage preferences.

As has been repeatedly observed, the dominant group in Sikh society is that of the Jats, the farmer caste of the central Punjab who constitute both economically and numerically the most significant section of the Panth and dominate its institutions. Their own rural base has historically given the traditional profile of Sikh society a pronounced rural bias, even taking into account the high percentage of the Indian population as a whole which lives in the villages.<sup>14</sup> To the dominant Jats must be added the specialist Sikh castes who serve the farmers as carpenters, blacksmiths, etc., who are known collectively as Ramgarhias. Below them a sharper line is to be drawn above the converts from Hindu untouchable castes who were attracted in large numbers earlier in this century to the egalitarian teachings of Sikhism promulgated by the Singh Sabha reformers. Traditionally employed mostly as landless agricultural labourers, these Mazhabi and Ramdasias Sikhs, although achieving some improvement in status through conversion, are yet to be fully integrated into the Panth. There is no question of intermarriage with Jats, who also ensure that they are debarred from owning land.



The strongly rural emphasis of Sikh society stands in sharp contrast to the social profile of the Punjabi Hindus, who even in the undivided Punjab with its Muslim majority dominated urban society. Although there are traditionally urban Sikh groups, notably the Khattri caste from which the Gurus sprang, and the Aroras, and although they have provided a notably high proportion of the community's intellectual leadership, they have always been in a small numerical minority in relation to the equivalent Hindu castes in the cities and to the rural castes among the Sikhs. In simplified terms, there has therefore been a reinforcement of the distinction between Sikh and Hindu interests by the differences between the residential and economic patterns of each group.

Even this rapid sketch should be sufficient to indicate that the position of the Sikhs in the truncated Punjab of independent India was hardly likely to be straightforward. The course of events after 1947, governed by conflicts between opposed local minority interests, as well as by the special concern of the central government with the affairs of a sensitive border area, then given further impetus by the effects of rapid economic and social change, proved indeed to be a tortuous one.

## VI

### *The Movement for Punjabi Suba*

In spite of the inequity between the size of the resources forcibly abandoned in Pakistan and those available to the refugees coming to India in 1947, official resettlement policies and the energies for which Punjabis are justly famous successfully combined to ensure the rapid re-establishment of economic life in the areas of the Punjab allocated to India. It was naturally there that the majority of Sikh refugees settled, although quite substantial numbers were also impelled to seek new opportunities in Delhi and other adjacent regions. From the outset Sikhs assumed a relatively prominent place in the national institutions of India, and they continued to be particularly heavily represented in the army, where the highest positions of command were now open to them as citizens of an independent country.

Also from the outset there was, however, among the Sikhs a powerful sense of grievance, most famously articulated in the rhetorical question of the Akali leader Master Tara Singh, 'the Hindus got Hindustan, the Muslims got Pakistan, what did the Sikhs get?'<sup>15</sup> To this sense of having somehow been cheated of their rights, made the more bitter by the lively consciousness of the days of Sikh glory before the British annexation, were added the long-standing fears of the Panth's dissolution and reabsorption into Hinduism. These fears were made the more acute by the fact of the overwhelming numerical and political dominance of the 80% Hindu majority in independent India. Repeatedly reminded of their status as a small minority of less than 2% of the national population, the Sikhs were quick to support any accusations levelled by the Akali leadership against government policies thought to endanger the Panth, whether of abolition of the British requirement for Sikh troops to maintain the symbols of orthodoxy, or the encouragement to abandon



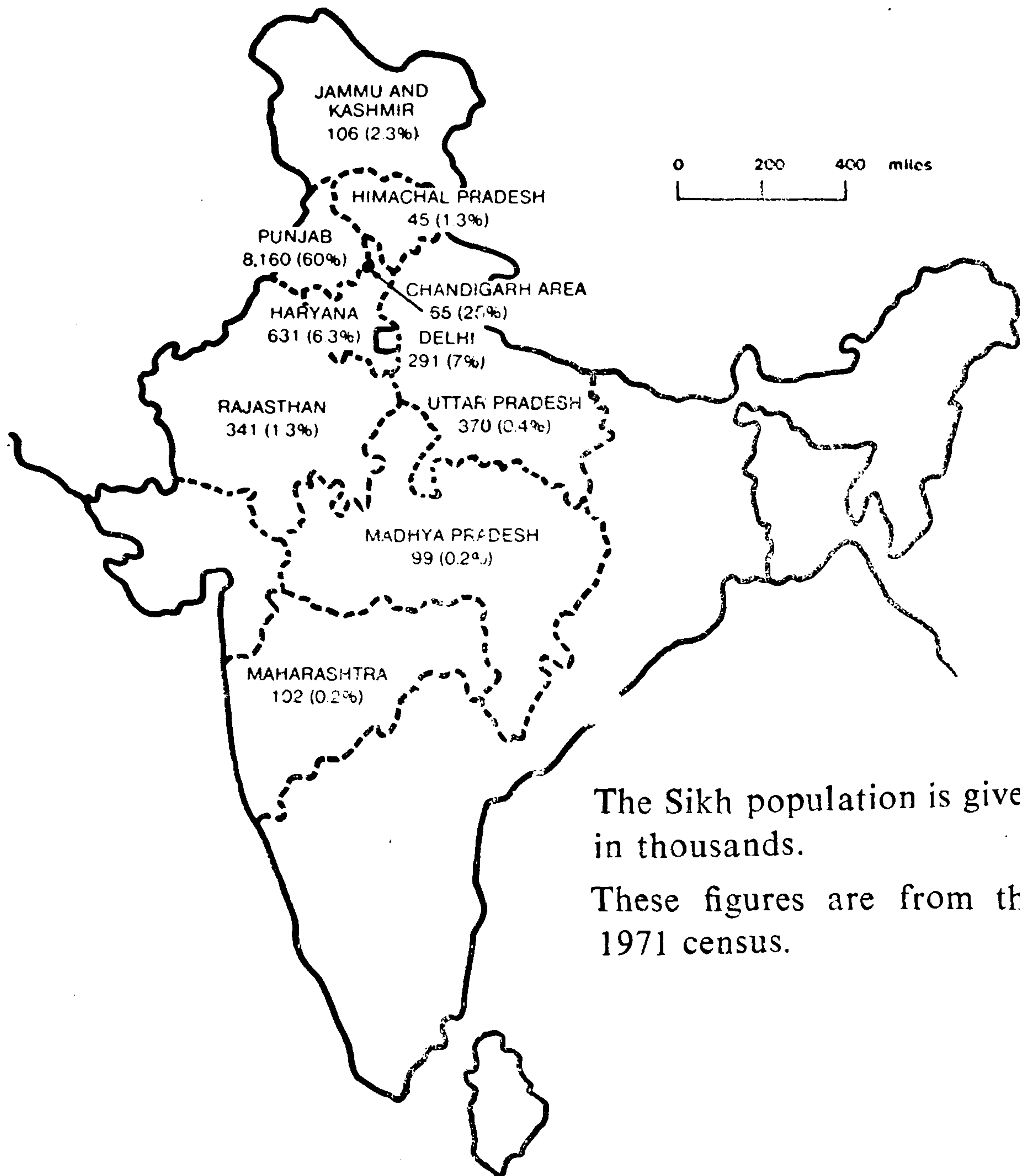
Sikhism considered to underlie the withholding of Scheduled Caste privileges from some low Sikh castes.<sup>16</sup>

Considerable Sikh support was also forthcoming for the main demand articulated by the Akali Dal, the reiteration of the need for some form of local political autonomy for the Sikhs, which they failed to obtain in 1947, but which was still seen as the only sure guarantee of the maintenance of the institutions and orthodox traditions of the Panth. This proposal naturally aroused fierce opposition from the Hindu population, and any prospect of its speedy implementation was made still more unlikely by the disfavour with which it was regarded by the central government in Delhi. The Nehru government was understandably reluctant to redraw political boundaries in a sensitive border area, not only adjacent to Pakistan, but also providing India's only land route to Kashmir, over whose future the two countries had already come to war. Committed to the ideal of a secular federal republic, the government was of course further firmly opposed to the idea of making concessions to a substantial political demand made by a religious minority.

As elsewhere in India, the political boundaries in the Punjab that had been bequeathed by the British represented a confusing legacy from their first haphazard annexations. Patiala and the other former princely states had been grouped into a state called PEPSU, in which Sikhs had come very slightly to outnumber Hindus as the result of refugee resettlement.<sup>17</sup> The remaining districts of eastern Punjab, extending from the Pakistan frontier to Delhi, soon had as their state capital the new city of Chandigarh, built to the design of Le Corbusier as a replacement for the Lahore which was lost to Pakistan. Here Sikhs constituted only a third of the overall population. They were hardly represented in the south-eastern districts of the Haryana area near Delhi, and although a majority in the rural heartlands of the north-west, here too they were outnumbered by the Hindus in such principal cities as Amritsar, Jullundur, and Ludhiana.

The Akali strategy was to press for a fresh division of the area in such a way as to combine the Sikh majority districts of Punjab and PEPSU in a new state. While there was a taboo on the communal formulation of such demands in religious terms as such, the Congress party had long been committed to the readjustment of state boundaries so as to conform with those

**STATES AND UNION TERRITORIES  
WITH A SIGNIFICANT SIKH POPULATION**



The Sikh population is given  
in thousands.

These figures are from the  
1971 census.



of the major languages of India. The Akali demand was therefore ostensibly for a Punjabi-speaking state, or Punjabi Suba. All sides were, however, well aware of the inextricable mix of language and religion in the area, and the Hindus of the north-western Punjabi-speaking region had enthusiastically responded to the encouragement to return their language as Hindi in the 1951 census.

This proved a powerful argument to be used against the Akali case before the national States Reorganization Commission. Sikh hopes were dashed when the Commission failed to recommend the application of the linguistic formula to Punjab that it had used elsewhere to adjust state lines to linguistic boundaries, prompting the bitter remark from one Akali that 'while others got States for their languages, we lost even our language'.<sup>18</sup> But there was little chance of immediate political redress. While the all-Sikh male electorate of the SGPC ensures a permanent Akali majority in this 'government within a government', the complete lack of appeal of the Akali Dal to the Hindus and its lukewarm support by the lower Sikh castes, who tend to see it as the political spokesman of their Jat landlords, ensured that it would at this time always be in a minority to Congress in the wider arena of state politics. And while Sikhs were then as now also powerfully represented in the Congress party in Punjab, the central authority of Delhi ensured that no support for Punjabi Suba could be expected from that quarter.

This situation forced the Akalis back to the familiar tactics of the agitational *morcha* in support of a separate Punjabi-speaking state in 1955, when their mass demonstrations resulted in police invasion of the Golden Temple, traditionally sacrosanct like other such places of worship in India as a 'privileged sanctuary'. As has repeatedly occurred in the cycle of Punjab politics, the *morcha* eventually resulted in a political compromise under whose terms PEPSU was merged into a large new Punjab in which the place of Punjabi and Hindi in their respective regions in the state was regulated by an elaborate formula. For a brief period there was close political cooperation between the Akalis and the Congress chief minister, Partap Singh Kairon, himself a Sikh. The resources of government patronage were also deployed to help secure the temporary triumph of Congress strategy.



Strains soon became apparent between the partners, however, and although some Akalis remained loyal to Congress, other rallied behind Master Tara Singh. Realizing that Kairon's strong opposition to the creation of a separate Punjabi Suba could only be countered by further agitation, and after an unsuccessful *morcha*, the Akali leaders borrowed from the Gandhian repertoire the tactic of a threatened fast-unto-death. Such a fast ended ignominiously for Master Tara Singh, when he was induced to break it in exchange for a vague promise of talks. This led to his being censured and ordered to perform religious penance, and power passed to his principal lieutenant Sant Fateh Singh, whose own group of Akali supporters later took over control of the SGPC. Kairon's fall from office in 1964 removed the main local political obstacle to the idea of a Punjabi Suba, for which Fateh Singh anyway proved a more acceptable advocate than had Tara Singh with his long history of identification with hard-line Sikh politics. Seeing advantages for themselves in political separation, the Hindu leaders of the Haryana region came to support it, and assent from the central government to the long-opposed idea of a fresh partition was finally won by a combination in September 1965 of another threatened fast-unto-death by Fateh Singh with the outbreak across the Punjab frontier of war with Pakistan. It was clearly now essential to bring the uncertainty to an end.

The division of the old state after only ten years into the new states of Punjab and Haryana, with some hilly areas being awarded to Himachal Pradesh, was formally approved in March and effected in June 1966. The Sikhs were now in a 60% majority in the new Punjab, where the official status of Punjabi was soon confirmed. They seemed finally to have achieved a large part of the goal for which they had so long striven. As so often in such circumstances, however, the reality proved more troublesome than had been envisaged. Apart from the problems of maintaining a long-fostered political momentum after the attainment of its principal objective, these difficulties arose partly from awkward facts of the situation, partly from the conditions attached to the government's award.

Besides religious and linguistic enclaves inevitably left on the wrong side of the new boundaries, there of course continued to be a very substantial Hindu urban population in the new



Punjab, with little enthusiasm for Punjabi. Hostages to fortune were also created by the small 5% Sikh minority left in Haryana. Nor were links with Haryana entirely broken. The most important reservations attached to the Punjab Reorganization Act were the retention of Chandigarh, on the border between the two states, as the joint capital of both with the status of a centrally administered Union Territory, and the placing under central control of the Bhakra dam complex, the major source of the region's hydroelectric power.

## ***VII***

### ***Development after 1966***

It was in attempts to overturn these reservations in favour of Punjab that the momentum of the previous campaigns was at first channelled. Another threatened fast-unto-death at the Golden Temple by Sant Fateh Singh in December 1966 produced no very tangible results, but helped to secure at the ensuing state elections the victory of his Akali Dal group over that of Tara Singh, who had attempted to outflank his rival by calling for the establishment of an autonomous Sikh homeland within India together with the reservation of posts for Sikhs in government services. The Sant Akali Dal assumed power in 1967 in an unlikely grouping of anti-Congress forces, including the Jan Sangh, the political party which has strong connections with the Arya Samaj. The short-lived coalition did at least succeed in reaching a compromise over the language issue which safeguarded the use of Hindi while recognizing the status of Punjab as a unilingual Punjabi state. This helped to remove this contentious issue from the centre of political debate in Punjab.<sup>19</sup>

The dispute over Chandigarh proved much harder to settle, as it also involved both Haryana and the central government. A fast undertaken in 1969 by the aged Darshan Singh Pheruman to secure its award to Punjab ended in his death, and impelled Fateh Singh to threaten yet another fast. From fear of the consequences of his intended self-immolation by fire, a government award was hurriedly announced in January 1970, according to which Chandigarh was to be awarded outright to Punjab after a five-year interim, but only at the price of the cession of the rich 'Hindi-speaking' Hindu majority areas of Fazilka and Abohar to Haryana, to which they were to be linked by a furlong-wide corridor of some 50 miles through Punjab territory, while the issue of control over the dams and irrigation headworks was left pending. This ingenious compromise has



proved a fruitful source of resentment, but has resulted in the continued maintenance of the status quo of 1970, since neither state has proved willing to implement its side of the proposed bargain.

It seemed in fact to many observers of the Punjab in the early 1970s that much of the steam had been taken out of the Sikh demands.<sup>20</sup> Master Tara Singh's long political life had been brought to a close by his death, while Fateh Singh's prestige had suffered from the rather unimpressive record of the Akalis in government, marked by continual splits and shifts in allegiance, and the tactic of fasts-unto-death was abandoned. More extreme voices, such as those raised in exile by Dr. Jagjit Singh Chauhan, a former supporter of Fateh Singh, in favour of an independent Sikh country of Khalistan commanded little support, and were readily discredited at the time by the encouragement naturally given to his proposal by the Pakistan government on his visit to that country during its third war with India in 1971.

The attention of commentators was drawn less to the politics than to the remarkable economic growth of Punjab. A densely populated agricultural area, it had historically been a source of emigration, most recently in the great wave of Sikh settlement from the Jullundur area to the United Kingdom in the 1950s and 1960s. Latterly, however, it had become one of the world's most remarkable beneficiaries of the so-called Green Revolution as anyone able to contrast the visually striking evidence of its prosperity with conditions in other parts of India or Pakistan will readily acknowledge. The new high-yielding strains of wheat had been introduced on a large scale in the 1960s, and with the aid of intensive chemical fertilization and tubewell irrigation these quickly produced a massive increase in the state's grain output. This acted to the great economic benefit, across community lines, of both the Jat Sikh farmers and the Hindu merchants of the towns and cities. Per capita income in Punjab has remained the highest of any Indian state, although Punjabi farmers feel that their contribution to this situation has been poorly recognized by the government, whether in terms of the prices they receive for their wheat as against those which they have to pay for fertilizers, or in terms of what is seen as an inadequate allocation of river water to Punjab, thus necessi-



tating the expensive sinking of tubewells for irrigation.

Any such process of rapid economic growth also inevitably entails social strains. In the countryside, a labour shortage followed the large-scale emigration of less prosperous Sikhs to Europe, North America and the Middle East. This could be made good only by an influx of agricultural workers from poorer parts of India such as eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. This in turn had inevitable consequences for the delicate linguistic and communal balance of the state, in which the Sikh majority is now reckoned at a bare 52%. Changes in urban society have also been marked. Central government has always been conspicuously reluctant to sanction investment in heavy industry in Punjab, perhaps partly because of its strategically unfavourable location on the border. There has, however, been remarkable expansion of small-scale industries, whose financing has been aided by the investment of remittances from overseas Sikhs. Chiefly linked to the requirements of the agricultural sector, still the dominant factor in the Punjab economy, these industries with their relatively high wages have proved a natural magnet for the lower rural castes. Even here, however, they in their turn face the competition of the *bhaiyas*, the new immigrants from eastern India.<sup>21</sup>

All these major socio-economic developments naturally had their impact on the state politics of Punjab, and on the perennial central issue of those politics, the status of the Sikhs. The larger scene was set by the national context of Indian politics, dominated for nearly two decades by the contradictory themes of the desire to centralize power in the hands of Mrs. Gandhi and her inner circle of advisers on the one hand, and of the numerous claims put forward for increased local autonomy by regional movements in different parts of the country on the other. As elsewhere in India, local rivalries in Punjab, whether between Congress and the Akali Dal or between factions in either party, always afforded the centre with opportunities for interference and with excuses for intervention, inevitably directed chiefly against the perceived interests of the strongest regional group. What has given Punjab politics their peculiar complexity and intensity is the special status of the Sikhs as a religious majority within the state, whose agricultural economy they dominate, which has also naturally seen itself as the chief



guarantor of the rights of the Sikhs as a small minority in the country as a whole. The composition of the population of Punjab obviously means that local interests are by no means co-terminous with those of the Sikhs, but it equally obviously entails that the two will be closely intertwined.

In party political terms, Punjab was dominated by the rivalry between Congress and the Akali Dal. While both had Sikh leadership, their constituencies were rather different. Congress could draw on support not only from the Hindus but also from the lower Sikh castes, while the Akali Dal had solid support from its traditional Sikh constituency, with its political base cemented as always by its domination of the SGPC. With the passing of the older generation of Akali leaders, the SGPC was in the hands of a rather stable group of powerful politicians representing landed interests, which has successfully resisted attempts to subvert its dominance, as may be seen from the long reign of Gurcharan Singh Tohra, president of the SGPC for the last thirteen years.

As had happened before the establishment of Punjab state in 1966, however, the Akali dominance of the SGPC was by no means so predictable when it came to state elections involving also a non-Sikh electorate. The elections of 1972 resulted in a comfortable victory for Congress, who then governed the state under the chief ministership of Giani Zail Singh, a Ramgarhia Sikh and close political ally of Mrs. Gandhi. Once more in opposition, the Akali Dal formulated in 1973 a document known as the Anandpur Sahib Resolution which, with subsequent modifications reflecting perceived threats to the Akali position, has since formed the basis of their negotiating position with the central government. Involving as they do not only questions of the economic and political claims of Punjab vis-à-vis the neighbouring states and the centre, but also the much wider issues of guarantees for the maintenance of the interests of Sikhs as a separately identifiable minority community in India, the demands of the Anandpur Sahib Resolution have inevitably been modified and added to in response to decisions made in Delhi. An early example of such a change was prompted by the government decision made in 1974 to alter the historical patterns of recruitment to the army so as to conform proportionately with the national population. Since the Sikhs of



Punjab had traditionally provided army recruits far above their numbers in the population,<sup>22</sup> this was naturally seen to constitute an attack on Sikh interests. Inevitably, however, such changes in Akali policy were treated by the central government as a plausible excuse for the further postponement of any overall settlement of a contentious package, which would have implications for both centre-state and for minority-status issues in the country as a whole. A process that was anyhow bound to be tortuous was thus further extended, with consequences that were to prove far more serious than can have been envisaged by any of the parties involved ten years ago.

At that time, Punjab politics were for a while overtaken by the crisis conditions created by the Emergency. This was followed by the election victory of the Janata opposition, as a result of which the Akali Dal under new political leadership once more became the majority party in an anti-Congress coalition in Punjab in 1977. The claims of the Akali leadership to speak for the Sikhs as a whole were strengthened by their overwhelming victory in the SGPC elections of 1979. At the state level, however, they were relegated to their familiar status as an opposition in 1980 after the triumphant return to power of Congress under Mrs. Gandhi, who appointed Giani Zail Singh as Home Minister in the central government.

In the following year the Akali Dal was led by inexorable political logic to return to its opposition tactics of agitation by massive peaceful demonstrations, and a *morcha* under the direction of Sant Harchand Singh Longowal was instituted to press for implementation of the Anandpur Sahib Resolution's demands.

Meanwhile, a fresh element had been introduced into a situation of familiar complexity by the emergence of Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale (1947-1984) from obscurity as a minor village preacher to the status of charismatic leader of a fierce brand of Sikh fundamentalism.<sup>23</sup> His rise to prominence was due in part to Congress encouragement of an internal rival to the Akali leadership, but also to the ready response which his call to an aggressive defence of Sikh rights found among younger Sikhs, particularly those from such sections of society as the poorer farmers whose relative economic position had taken a sharp turn for the worse in the economic revolution in Punjab.<sup>24</sup>



While the undermining of community status by economic change might have helped provide the audience for this new message of an uncompromising assertion of Sikh rights, its chief protagonist was hastened in his rise by association with violent sectarian conflict. Bitter conflict between Sikhs and the breakaway Sant Nirankari sect resulted in the killing of 14 Sikhs who had gone to oppose a rally of the Sant Nirankaris at Amritsar in 1978. This was followed by other killings, and the Sant Nirankaris' heretical status in Sikh eyes as followers of teachings grotesquely distorted from those of the Gurus was confirmed by an edict issued from the Akal Takht, the supreme seat of Sikh orthodoxy. Few tears were shed when the Sikh cause was thought to have been vindicated by the murder in Delhi in 1980 of the Sant Nirankari leader. Bhindranwale, widely believed to be implicated in the case, achieved an immediate popularity which overturned the humiliation of his followers in the SGPC elections in the preceding year, and he was seen as a hero by the youth wing of the Akali Dal, the All-India Sikh Students' Federation (AISSF).

Events thereafter moved with increasing rapidity towards open violence, which was to result in several hundred deaths in the next three years,<sup>25</sup> before it was brought to an even more violent conclusion by the army's action in June 1984. The assassination in September 1981 of Lala Jagat Narain, editor of a strongly pro-Hindu newspaper, led to the arrest of Bhindranwale, but his speedy release led to a further increase in his prestige. The weak provincial government proved unable to pursue any very firm policy against the activities of the Sant and his supporters in the AISSF. In 1982 he moved to the sanctuary of the Guru Nanak Niwas, a hostel in the precincts of the Golden Temple, where he not only drew an increasing number of followers to his banner, but also became the focus of attention of those covering the growing crisis in Punjab, in whose development the activities of his notorious hit-squads, mounted on motorcycles, were the principal catalyst, if by no means the only factor.

Meanwhile the Akali leaders, in continued control of the SGPC but ousted from state power by their Congress rivals, had little alternative but to pursue the demands of the Anandpur Resolution by renewed agitational tactics. These were stepped



up in August 1982 under the name of a *dharam yudh morcha* or 'holy war agitation', which resulted in some impressive large scale demonstrations. Limited concessions to some demands were made by central government, on such issues as the permission to broadcast hymns from the Golden Temple, the restriction on the sale of tobacco and other forbidden substances in its environs, and the restitution of the right to wear the Sikh symbol of the *kirpan* on internal flights. Considerable ill-feeling was, on the other hand, caused by the refusal to grant such apparently minor concessions as the proposed change of name of the Bombay-Amritsar express from 'Flying Mail' to 'Golden Temple Express'.

On more substantive issues even less progress was made. While the Akalis were able with some justification to accuse the government of delaying tactics, they in their turn faced the charge of endlessly revising their demands upwards in an effort to counter the challenge of Bhindranwale. Whereas twenty years before it had been Master Tara Singh who was regarded as the extremist in his advocacy of Sikh demands, the Akali leadership were now cast as the 'moderates' between the determinedly centralist policies of the government in Delhi and the increasingly explicit espousal of separatist Sikh nationalism being promulgated by Bhindranwale and his radical supporters.

The law and order situation in Punjab continued to deteriorate throughout 1983, primarily as a consequence of the assassinations of both Hindus and Sikhs antipathetic to Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale's cause, but also to the inevitable reprisals whether in the form of official repression or private revenge which these stimulated. Not only were the effects on the economic life of Punjab increasingly grave, but reactions were inevitably provoked outside the state, as Hindu organizations in Haryana and elsewhere mounted their own backlash against local Sikhs. The provincial Congress government was at last replaced by President's rule in October 1983, but even so there was little improvement in public security, given the uncertainty in the direction of political leadership and the considerable demoralization of the police.



## VIII

### *The Events of 1984*

While the Sant himself moved further within the Golden Temple complex to the greater security of the Akal Takht, one of the holiest of Sikh shrines, the killings outside continued unabated. Amongst the hundreds of victims, particular public revulsion was felt at the murders of the young leftist journalist Sumit Singh 'Shammi', a clean-shaven Sikh with a Hindu wife, on 22 February 1984, and Vishva Nath Tiwari, a Congressite Hindu professor of Punjabi with a Sikh wife, on 3 April 1984.<sup>26</sup> If liberal voices such as these were to be thus silenced in pursuit of an extreme solution to the problems of the Sikhs as a minority in India, the future of Punjabi life looked bleak indeed.

It was widely thought in India and abroad that the Prime Minister, having for whatever reasons allowed the crisis to develop so far, was waiting for reactions to develop to just this point before undertaking decisive action against Bhindranwale and his followers and the other militants who had fortified themselves inside the privileged sanctuary of the Golden Temple. Doubtless with an eye to gaining the maximum support of the Hindu vote of northern India in the national elections due to be held by January 1985, much was made of the separatism advocated or implied in Bhindranwale's speeches, and of his alleged connexions across the border with highly-placed Pakistani officials, who were said to have provided him with extensive material support. In this way, it was considered, at least some of the harmful consequences which would inevitably result from the violation of the Sikhs' most sacred sanctuary might be mitigated.

With the political ground thus supposedly prepared, the army was finally sent into Amritsar on 1 June 1984 in the move, code-named Operation Bluestar, which had been designed to eliminate the Sikh militants from the Golden Temple. The



operation was militarily successful, but only at a surely unforeseen material, human, and political cost. The Akali leaders, who had felt obliged to be inside the Temple as a mark of solidarity with the Sikh cause, responded to the call to surrender and were promptly taken into custody. But Bhindranwale and his associates mounted an unexpectedly fierce resistance, which did not end until the last of them was killed on 6 June. The casualty figures are still disputed, but included at least some 220 troops and perhaps 1000 others, including many innocent pilgrims caught in the crossfire. Even more shocking to many Sikhs were the revelations of the very extensive damage done to the temple buildings and their contents. This covered not only the SGPC records and other archives but irreplaceable manuscripts, some from the time of the Gurus, and—most obviously of all—the virtual destruction of much of the Akal Takht.<sup>27</sup>

As had been foreseen, however imperfectly, the most serious consequence of the storming of the Golden Temple was its immediate effect in polarizing Hindu and Sikh opinion. The great majority of Hindus seem to have regarded it as at least a necessary operation, more dangerously as a triumph of arms over a troublesome and over-confident group which had long been in need of such a lesson. But to Sikhs, both in India and still more abroad, the army action represented an outrage of the first dimension, to be readily compared with the earlier destructions of their most sacred shrine by the Afghans of Ahmad Shah Abdali.

The ensuing mutiny of some Sikh troops in other parts of India, which while quickly suppressed is itself likely to influence future government policies on recruitment, was one immediate expression of their reaction, while another was the obloquy which was widely directed against the Sikh generals in command of the operation and against Giani Zail Singh, created the first Sikh President of India in 1982, for his apparently unquestioning support of the government line. Many other Sikhs prominent in Indian national life, who might have had little sympathy with the Akalis, still less with the new militancy, felt impelled to symbolize their sense of outrage by renouncing government decorations or by resigning from public office. At the other end of the spectrum there arose amongst Sikhs abroad, unconstrained by the presence of the army in Punjab or by the realities of



Indian political life, an upsurge of support for the separatist demand for Khalistan that had previously been espoused only by very small groups. The more unpleasant features of Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale's aggressively revivalist version of Sikhism were quickly pushed into the background for many Sikhs by the image of his heroic martyrdom in defence of the Panth and its holiest institution, and the parallel was readily drawn with the figure of Baba Deep Singh, the famous 18th century warrior from whom he claimed spiritual descent.<sup>28</sup>

The massive deployment of the army in Punjab, however, following the earlier imposition of President's rule, meant that the political initiative since June has rested with the central government, whose strategy has been to attempt on the one hand finally to eliminate as a political force what is seen as Sikh terrorism, on the other to conciliate as far as possible the rest of Sikh opinion, while the recognized leadership of the Akali Dal continue to be detained. This inevitably proved a difficult policy to effect fully, particularly in the wider context of a pre-election period.

The censorship which has been in force in Punjab makes it impossible to assess fully the role which has been played there by the army in the last seven months. It would appear to have been largely successful in military terms. Some spectacular instances of Sikh resistance continued to be recorded, as in the cutting of a major canal and the hijacking of an Indian Airlines aeroplane to Lahore in July. But while there has been no shortage in the number of instances of violence subsequently reported, especially in the border districts, these have clearly been on a scale far smaller than in the heyday of Bhindranwale. The historic Sikh tradition of guerilla activity and impossibility of sealing the frontier, whatever the truth of reports of the existence of Pakistani-sanctioned training camps across the border, make it unlikely that such incidents will be totally eliminated. The continued presence of the army on such a scale must, however, be a cause for concern. Little credence need be given to the surely exaggerated figures of Sikhs killed and arrested that are widely circulated amongst Sikh communities in diaspora. But from the point of view of a later settlement, the absence of substantial independent confirmation must provide some cause for disquiet, given the kind of repressive action to which govern-



ment forces engaged in a long-term 'cleaning-up' operation of this type may all too easily be tempted to resort.

The task of reconciliation on the political front was from the outset clearly going to be an even more complex operation. The official statement of the government's reasons for sanctioning the storming of the Golden Temple were published in a White Paper in July.<sup>29</sup> This lengthy attack on both the Akalis and Bhindranwale received a very lukewarm reception from neutral critics in India, and speedily provoked outright rebuttals from the Sikhs abroad whose feelings it had partly been designed to placate.<sup>30</sup>

The restoration of the Golden Temple, to which both the President and the Prime Minister had paid widely publicized visits, above all of the Akal Takht, was clearly a major priority in the process of reconciliation, but its implementation proved to be fraught with all sorts of difficulties. Sikh tradition demands that work on major gurdwaras, as in the regular cleaning of the pool in the Golden Temple, be carried out by voluntary manual labour by the community, called *kar sewa*. Here the government, in physical control, was immediately confronted with the problems that stemmed from its alienation of the Akalis and the SGPC, legally responsible for the Temple's administration. Efforts to find respected Sikhs to oversee *kar sewa* proved fruitless, and the choice eventually fell on Baba Santa Singh, the head of one of the minority Nihang sects allied with Congress and strongly hostile to the Akalis. Massive public resources were poured into the restoration, including 40 kilograms of gold for gilding, which was carried out with great efficiency and speed in purely mechanical terms. But great ill-feeling was caused by what was generally seen as a transparent flouting of the principles of *kar sewa* by using a compliant Sikh figurehead to oversee paid labourers.

The government sponsored a rally of Sikhs in Amritsar in August in an attempt to boost support and enhance Santa Singh's authority, but this was speedily overtaken in its impact by a more successful Akali-based convention in the following month. These first attempts to divorce the majority of Sikhs from active or passive sympathy with the Akali position were thus soon seen to be sterile strategies. Given the detention of the Akali leadership, such government initiatives had in fact the



contrary effect of bestowing greater authority than before on the five Sikh 'high priests'.<sup>31</sup> Technically the servants of the lay officials of the SGPC, these now found themselves in the unaccustomed role of acting as front-line political spokesmen, a role to which they naturally found some difficulty in adjusting, to the disappointment of both government and Sikh expectations. So while by October the government had succeeded in completing the physical restoration of the Akal Takht, in divesting itself of the necessary embarrassment of Santa Singh, and in handing back the Golden Temple safely to the priests, there was little sign of a serious willingness to pursue wider political initiatives that might lead to a more lasting settlement of Sikh grievances.

Such considerations were, however, tragically overtaken on 31 October 1984 by the news of the assassination of Mrs. Gandhi at her residence in New Delhi by two of her Sikh bodyguards, Beant Singh who was killed immediately afterwards, and his collaborator Satwant Singh who was severely wounded. This reprisal for the storming of the Golden Temple had consequences which immediately showed how dangerous the underlying situation had now been allowed to become. The alienation of some Sikhs abroad was disagreeably broadcast by the televised pictures of their rejoicing in the streets of London at the terrible news. Widely and immediately condemned, such trivia were straightaway overtaken by the reports of the dreadful vengeance being exacted by Hindu mobs, all too often with official compliance, against innocent Sikhs outside Punjab in India. Over 1000 Sikhs were killed in the first days of November. Nowhere were the atrocities worse than in Delhi, where the official count of 759 fatalities could hardly do justice to the scale on which the ghastly scenarios of communal violence witnessed in the partition of 1947 were briefly re-enacted.

Sworn in as her successor, the murdered Prime Minister's son Rajiv Gandhi soon exercised his authority to bring these murders to an end. At least some of those who had instigated and condoned them were brought to justice, and basic relief measures for the victims were organized. But it was soon apparent that terrible damage had been done, not only in terms of the immediate human and material suffering, but also to the fundamental issue of the mutual confidence of Sikhs and Hindus

in one another as equal citizens of one country. The murky conspiracy theories being invoked as explanations of Mrs. Gandhi's assassination are one expression of this suspiciousness,<sup>32</sup> and the call of the Akalis for Sikhs to return to the safety of Punjab and the rush of offers to exchange Hindu and Sikh property in the search for territorial security are other significant warnings of the dangers which may lie ahead.

While Punjab remains outside the political process, the national elections have inevitably dominated the last weeks of 1984 in India. Now that these elections have resulted in an unprecedented majority for the Congress party, it can only be hoped that the newly-elected Prime Minister's pledge to give priority to the solution of the Punjab crisis<sup>33</sup> will be speedily effected and will find the necessary appropriate response.



## *Conclusion*

In life, much of Bhindrawale's appeal lay in his power to articulate forcefully the easily invoked extreme solutions to minority status that might be reached by open fighting between the Sikh turban and the Hindu cap:

'It is a matter of keeping the unshorn hair, the beard, and the sword-belt. The Sikhs are separate nation. Some say we are separate already. If so, then why say we are second-class citizens? That the Sikhs are historically separate even the cap-people have admitted. But if Bhindranwala proclaims this, they say that what he wants is Khalistan. We have endured enough slavery over the past 36 years. Now, no matter how many heads may roll, we must be free.'<sup>34</sup>

There is no doubt that this year's events have increased the emotional appeal, particularly to Sikhs in the diaspora,<sup>35</sup> of the idea of an independent Sikh republic of Khalistan, which has been put forward for some years by Dr. Jagjit Singh Chauhan and small groups in London and North America. Quite apart from the impossibility of the Indian Government's ever entertaining the idea of giving up Punjab, a small but rich and strategically vital part of its territory, both demographic and economic factors provide powerful arguments against Khalistan. Punjab itself has only the barest Sikh majority, whose very prosperity depends on access to the vast India market, while many Sikhs live in other parts of India, and play an important part in its national life. Their vulnerability was cruelly exposed in the riots at the beginning of November 1984, and it may also be pointed out that the consequences of the earlier establishment of Pakistan have not proved entirely happy for the large number of Muslims who remain in India and feel themselves to be a minority which has had more obvious grounds than the Sikhs for complaints about their status.

In spite of all that has happened in 1984, the political real-

ities of the situation must dictate a return to some form of negotiations on the many unresolved points raised in the Anandpur Sahib Resolution. Extremist terror may have been silenced at terrible cost, but, as has been shown by the failure of the transparent attempts to find a plausible alternative leadership and the re-election of the detained president of the SGPC to yet a further term of office, majority Sikh opinion cannot be indefinitely disregarded. There is certainly a large agenda to be covered, given the fact that Sikhs are a minority of a very special kind in India, ranging from political and economic issues to more purely religious ones.

Some of the Akali demands relate to extensions to the political authority and geographical territory of Punjab, including a general increase in the degree of autonomy to be given to the states, increased financial allocations from the centre, and the adjustment of boundaries so as to include neighbouring Punjabi-speaking areas, besides the familiar issues of Chandigarh and control of the rivers. Related demands are concerned with the safeguarding of Sikh rights in other states, where they are in a minority, whether by compelling adjacent states to declare Punjabi to be their official second language, or stopping the evictions of Sikh farmers from their lands, as has happened to some of the Sikh settlers who went to develop the Terai region of Uttar Pradesh in the 1950s. Others relate to the place of Sikhs in the nation as a whole, particularly the demand that the Sikh ratio in the army should be maintained as it was before 1974. Then there is the set of demands for the government to confirm by legal enactments the special status of the Sikhs, through declaring Amritsar to be a holy city; through enacting an All India Gurdwara Act—replacing the Sikh Gurdwaras Act of 1925 which applies only to Punjab and Haryana—which would considerably extend the powers of the SGPC at the expense of those presently exercised by the government; and finally through amending Article 25 of the Indian Constitution which is now not thought to recognize in due fashion the separate identity of the Sikhs,<sup>36</sup> and granting them the right to have their own personal law.

This is a long list, many of whose items will require compromises and call for the sort of largeness of spirit on both sides that has been all too conspicuous by its absence in recent years



if they are to be implemented in such a way as to fulfil realistically the expectations of both the Sikhs and the other groups that would be affected. But without a workable solution to the Punjab crisis there can be no effective resolution of what has now come to be a crisis of confidence for the Sikh community as a whole. In the rapidly changing social and economic conditions of contemporary India, it would be rash to predict the future evolution of the Sikh Panth, which has already come successfully through so many stages of self-transformation. In the present situation the real tragedy would be if the Sikhs were, through an absence of statesmanship, to be allowed to retreat or driven to withdraw into the state of mind of a minority in the worst sense, with the permanent feelings of disgruntled resentment which the term can sometimes all too easily suggest.

## Footnotes

1. Dr. S.S. Sodhi, 'Why are the Sikhs up in Arms in India?', *The Sikh Review*, January 1983, p 33.
2. While the views expressed are of course my own, I should like to record my thanks for help in locating source material to Tudor Parfitt, John Parry, Ralph Russell, Rupert Snell, and David Taylor.
3. *Tuzuk-e Jahangiri*, quoted in Khushwant Singh (1977), I, p 60.
4. As in Bhai Vir Singh's popular novel *Sundari* (1898), summarized in Harbans Singh (1972), pp 38-54.
5. Khushwant Singh (1977), II, p 160.
6. Ibbetson (1883), quoted in McLeod (1976). p 95.
7. Aply described in Barrier (1970), which rightly draws attention to its single most famous tract, Kahn Singh's *Hum Hindu Nahin*, 'We are not Hindus' (1899).
8. The translation requires the gloss that Akali means 'follower of the Akal'. Akal is one of the commonest Sikh titles for God, and appears in the Sikh greeting *Sat Sri Akal* 'True is the Immortal Lord', and the name Akal Takht, literally the 'Immortal Throne'.
9. Figures are commonly quoted to the effect that 93 Sikhs out of a total of 121 were hanged during the Independence movement, and 2147 Sikhs out of 2646 transported. These figures need to be understood in the context of the particularly violent British repression of earlier Sikh sectarian and revolutionary movements.
10. While contemporary pictures show him as clean-shaven with a small moustache, modern Sikh iconography depicts Bhagat Singh as an orthodox martyr with beard and turban.
11. Analysed in great detail in Brass (1974), Part IV.



12. Conveniently printed as an appendix in Cole & Sambhi (1978), pp 168-179.
13. See Harbans Singh, 'The Sikh Faith and the Nirankaris: a Historical Perspective', *The Sikh Review*, August 1978, pp 6-11.
14. Continually altered political boundaries make statistical comparisons difficult, though reference may be made to the carefully adjusted tables given in Brass (1974).
15. Quoted e.g. in Nayar (1966), p 102.
16. See Khushwant Singh (1977), II, p 304.
17. Party as the result of deliberate Sikh planning, see Brass (1974), p 319.
18. Hukam Singh, quoted in Brass (1974), p 320.
19. For details see Narain (1976), pp 276-7.
20. Compare J.C. Anand, 'Punjab' in Narain (1976), pp 262-297, and Khushwant Singh (1977), II, pp 306 ff.
21. See R. Ballard, 'The Context and Consequences of Migration: Jullundur and Mirpur Compared', *New Community*, Autumn-Winter 1983, pp 117-136; also 'The Bitter Drama of the Sikhs', *New Society*, 21 June 1984, pp 464-6.
22. Official figures are unavailable, but it is reliably estimated that Sikhs now make up about 10% of the Indian army, with a rather higher representation in the officer corp. The decline from an earlier maximum of 20% or more is to be attributed in part to economic changes in Punjab, and has anyway far to go before matching the percentage of Sikhs in the population as a whole. More general charges of anti-Sikh discrimination must be viewed with some caution. See Nayar (1966), pp 122 ff for evidence on the issue earlier submitted to the Das Commission of 1961.
23. An informative if unsympathetic portrait is given in Dhiren Bhagat, 'The Indian Ayatollah', *The Spectator*, 16 June 1984, pp 8-9.
24. An informed exposition of the types of grievance which fuelled the support for Bhindranwale is presented in Joyce Pettigrew, 'Take not arms against thy Sovereign: the present Punjab crisis and the storming of the Golden Temple', *South Asia Research*, 4, 2, November 1984, pp 102-103.
25. The troubled events of these years have generated an enormous ephemeral literature, usefully listed in Man



Singh Deora and Rajinder Grover, 'Punjab imbroglio: bibliography of selected articles' *Punjab Journal of Politics* VIII, 1, January-June 1984, pp 149-169. The most accessible record is to be found in the detailed fortnightly coverage of events in *India Today*.

26. See *India Today*, 15 March 1984, p 10, and 30 April 1984, p 13; also *Link*, 15 April 1984, pp 16-17.
27. One of the fullest accounts is again in *India Today*, 30 June 1984, pp 8-21, also 15 August 1984, pp 30-39.
28. This picture is developed in detail in the articles and features (in Punjabi) in the 'Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindrawale Martyr Memorial Issue' of the London-published *Des Pardes*, June 1984. The belief that Bhindranwale yet lives on is described in Shyam Bhatia, 'Myth of hero's escape from Golden Temple', *The Observer*, 1 July 1984, p 10.
29. Government of India, *White Paper on the Punjab Agitation*, New Delhi, July 10, 1984.
30. See for instance Sukhbir Singh Kapoor, *Invasion of the Golden Temple*, London 1984.
31. These are the two chief priests of the Akal Takht, the head priest of the Golden Temple itself, and the head priests of the two *takhts* in Punjab at Anandpur and Damdama. Head priests of the other *takhts* (see Section III) were also appealed to for rulings.
32. As in all such theories, the fateful spectre of the 'foreign hand' aiding native traitors is continually raised. Compare the immediate report of 'Moscow hints US involved in murder of Mrs. Gandhi', *The Guardian*, 2 November 1984, p 9, and the later extended reports in *Link*, 18 November 1984, pp 13-22 and *India Today*, 15 December 1984, pp 22-29.
33. As reported in *The Times*, 31 December 1984, p 1.
34. Translated from *Des Pardes*, June 1984.
35. Number of the major communities are estimated at some 300,00 in the United Kingdom, 100,000 in the United States, and 100,000 in Canada.
36. Article 25, placed under the heading of 'Right to Freedom of Religion', reads as follows:  
25. (1) Subject to public order, morality and health and to the other provisions of this Part, all persons are equally



entitled to the freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess, practise and propagate religion.

(2) Nothing in this article shall affect the operation of any existing law or prevent the State from making any law—

(a) regulating or restricting any economic, financial, political or other secular activity which may be associated with religious practice;

(b) providing for social welfare and reform or the throwing open of Hindu religious institutions of a public character to all classes and sections of Hindus.

*Explanation I*—The wearing and carrying of *kirpans* shall be deemed to be included in the profession of the Sikh religion.

*Explanation II*—In sub-clause (b) of clause (2), the reference to Hindus shall be construed as including a reference to persons professing the Sikh, Jaina or Buddhist religion, and the reference to Hindu religious institutions shall be construed accordingly.

## ***Glossary***

Adi Granth	The 'Original Book', the Sikh scriptures first compiled in 1904.
AISSF	The All-India Sikh Students' Federation, founded in 1943 as the youth wing of the Akali Dal.
Akali Dal	The political party which controls the SGPC and has dominated Sikh affairs for the past 60 years.
Akal Takht	The supreme seat of Sikh religious authority, situated opposite the Harimandir in the Golden Temple complex.
Granthi	The 'reader' in charge of the scriptures in a gurdwara.
Gurdwara	A Sikh temple, literally 'door of the Guru'.
Guru Granth Sahib	The honorific title applied to the Sikh scriptures, or Adi Granth.
Jatha	Originally a detachment in the Sikh guerrilla armies, now applied to a group participating in an Akali demonstration.
Kar sewa	The voluntary manual labour by which Sikh temples are maintained.
Khalistan	'Land of the Khalsa', a coinage used to denote the idea of an independent Sikh state.
Khalsa	The 'Company of the Pure', the militant order of orthodox Sikhs instituted by Guru Gobind Singh.
Kirpan	The sword or dagger worn by orthodox Sikhs, one of the 'Five K's'.
Langar	The free kitchen attached to a gurdwara.
Morcha	Literally 'entrenchment', the term applied



	to the mass agitations that are an important part of Akali strategy.
Panth	Literally 'path', the term usually used to describe the Sikh community as a whole.
Patit	A lapsed Sikh who has ceased to observe the outward marks of Khalsa orthodoxy.
Sahajdhari	A Sikh who believes in the Gurus' teachings without observing the Khalsa discipline.
Sant	A title of respect given to Sikh religious leaders.
SGPC	The Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee which controls the major gurdwaras of Punjab.
Takht	Literally 'throne' one of the five seats of Sikh spiritual authority, including the Akal Takht and those at Anandpur, Patna, Nander, and Damdama.

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# **The Sikhs**

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**By Dr. Christopher Shackle**

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The tragic events of the past few years in Punjab moved in October-November 1984 to a traumatic climax : the assassination of the Prime Minister and the most brutal communal attacks since Partition. A political solution to the Punjab crisis must be found. A deeper understanding of the Sikhs as a group with a strong consciousness of their own particular identity, could help in the effort.

Dr. Christopher Shackle, reader in Modern Indian Languages at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, wrote this report in 1984 for the Minority Rights Group, winner of the 1982 United Nations Association Media Peace Prize. Written originally for an international audience, the book has been revised by the author for publication in India. Those interested in the Punjab problem can judge for themselves how interested and informed persons living in other countries view the Punjab problems. Widely welcomed as balanced and objective, Shackle gives a concise account of Sikh history and religious beliefs and Akali political aspirations. It is a valuable document for the media, academics and all who seek insight into the present crisis.



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